

# HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

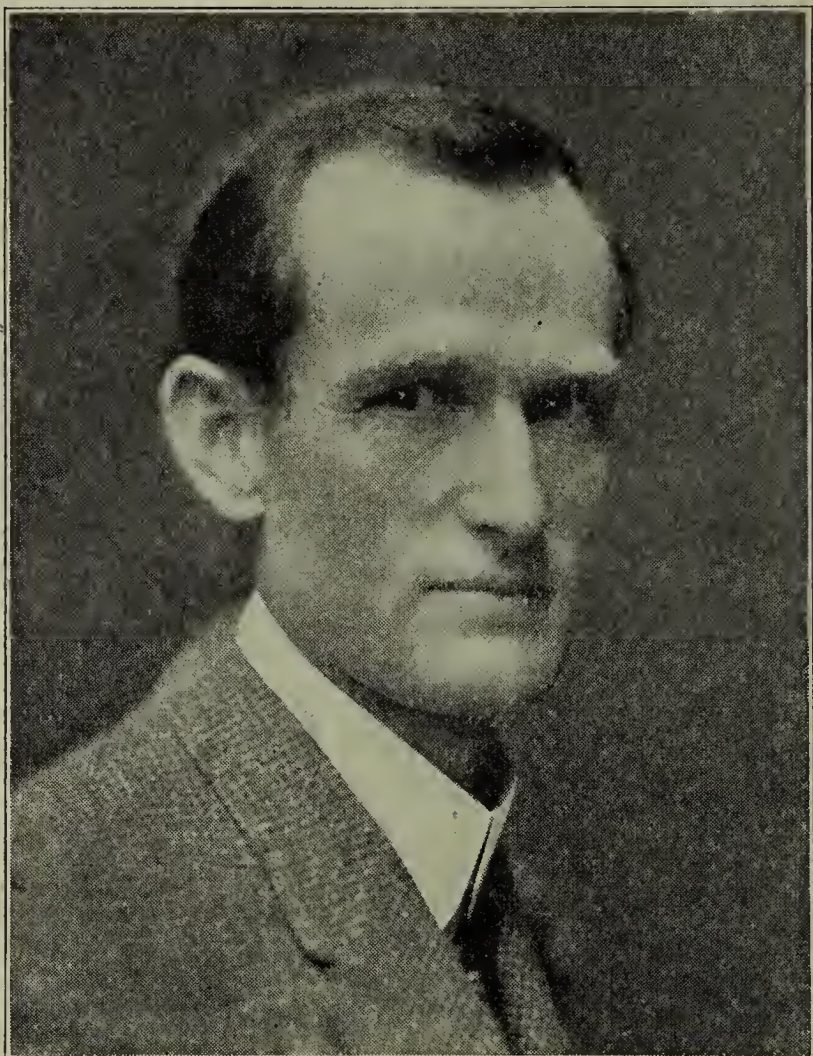
A BIOGRAPHY

INTIMATE AND  
AUTHORITATIVE

By ELSBERY  
W. REYNOLDS

This booklet will give the reader a knowledge and understanding of the life work, aims and purposes of Harold Bell Wright as expressed through his books. It is published for free distribution by the publishers of the author's works. Extra copies furnished on request. Your efforts to give it a wider circulation will be greatly appreciated.

—*The Publishers.*



## Harold Bell Wright

Author of

That Printer of Udell's

The Shepherd of the Hills

The Calling of Dan Matthews

The Uncrowned King

The Winning of Barbara Worth

Their Yesterdays

The Eyes of the World

When a Man's a Man

# Harold Bell Wright

*A Biography*

Intimate and Authoritative

*By*

Elsbery W. Reynolds

The biography of a man is of importance and interest to other men just to the degree that his life and work touches and influences the life of his time and the lives of individuals.

Only in a feeble way, at best, can the life story of any man be told on the printed page. The story is better as it is written on the hearts of men and women and the man himself does the writing.

He lives longest who lives best. He who carves deepest against corroding time is he who touches with surest hand the greatest number of human hearts.

He may or may not be a prodigy of physical strength. He may or may not be a tower of mental energy. But so long as this old world stands the man with an overpowering desire for all that is best for the race to be in the race, whose life is in tune with the divine and with the good that is within us all, whether he be orator, writer, artist or artisan, is a giant among men.

That which we read makes a deeper and more lasting impression on our lives than that which we see or hear. An author with millions of readers must be a great central power of thought and in-



fluence, at least, in his own day and generation. We can understand the truth of this through a study of the aims and life purposes of Harold Bell Wright as expressed through his books and the circumstances under which they were written.

The wonderful popularity of this author is well estimated by the millions of copies of his books that have been sold. This is also the greatest testimonial that can be given to the merit of his work. The great heart of the reading public is an unprejudiced critic. "Is not the greatest voice the one to which the greatest number of hearts listen with pleasure?"

When a man has attained to great eminence under adverse circumstances we sometimes wonder to what heights he might have climbed under conditions more favorable. Who can tell? It is just as easy to say what the young man of twenty will be when a matured man of forty. The boy of poverty makes a man of power while the boy nursed in the lap of luxury makes a man of uneventful life, and, again, a life started with a handicap remains so through its possible three score years and ten and the life begun with advantages multiplies its talents ten and a hundred fold.

So, after all, is not the heart of man the real man and is it not the guiding star of his ambition, his will, his determination, his conscience?

Harold Bell Wright, the second of four sons, was born May 4, 1872, in Rome, Oneida County, New York. From an

earlier biographer we quote the following:

"Some essential facts must be dug from out the past where they lie embedded in the detrital chronicles of the race. Say, then, that away back in 1640 a ship load of Anglo-Saxon freedom landed in New England. After a brief period some of the more venturesome spirits emigrated to the far west and settled amid the undulations of the Mohawk valley in central New York. Protestant France also sent westward some Gallic chivalry hungering for freedom. The fringe of this garment of civilization spread out and reached also into the same valley. English determination and Huguenot aspiration touched elbows in the war for political and religious freedom, and touched hearts and hands in the struggle for economic freedom. Their generations were a genuine aristocracy. Mutual struggles after mutual aims cemented casual acquaintance into enduring friendship. William Wright met, loved and married Alma T. Watson. To them four sons were born. A carpenter contractor, a man who builds, contrives and constructs, is joined to a woman into whose soul of wholesome refinement come images of dainty beauty, where they glow and grow radiant. With lavish unrestraint the life of this French woman pours itself into her sons. The third child died in infancy. The eldest survived his mother by some thirteen years. The youngest is a constructive mechanical engineer. The second son is Harold Bell Wright.

"During ten years this mother and this

son live in rare intimacy. The boy's first enduring impression of this life is the vision of the mother bending affectionately over him while criticising the water color sketch his unpractised fingers had just made. Crude blendings and faulty lines were pointed out, then touched into harmony and more accurate perspective by her quick skill. Together their eyes watched shades dance on sunny slopes, cloud shadows race among the hills or lie lazily in the valley below.

"Exuberant Nature and ebullient boy loved each other from the first. Alone, enraptured, he often wandered far in sheer joy of living. He brings, one day, from his rambles a bunch of immortelles which mother graciously receives. Twenty years later the boy, man-grown, bows reverently over a box of withered flowers—the same bouquet the mother took that day and laid away as a precious memento of his boyish love. Such was the first decade.

"A ten year old boy, motherless, steals from harsh labor and yet harsher surroundings, runs to the home of sacred memories, clambers to the attic, and spends the night in anguished solitude. This was his first Gethsemane. For ten years buffeted and beaten, battling with adversity, sometimes losing but never lost, snatching learning here and there, hating sham, loving passionately, misunderstood, misapprehended, too stubbornly proud to ask apologies or make useless explanations, fighting poverty in the depths of privation, wrestling existence from toil he loathed, befriending

many and also befriended much, but always face to face with the grim tragedy which has held part of the stage since Eden.

"Such was the second decade. The first was spent on hill sides where shadows only made the light more buoyant as they fled away. The second was passed in the valley where the shadow hung lazily till the cloud grew very black and drenched the soil.

"Lured to college, he undertook to acquire academic culture. As is well known, college life with its professorial anecdotes and jokes, its student pranks and grind, is routine drudgery and cobwebbery prose. Bookish professors and conventional students rarely have just such an animate problem of French artistry and Bohemian experience to solve. They did nobly, to be sure, but here was a mind which threw over them all the glamour of romance."

Mr. Wright entered the Preparatory Department of Hiram College at the age of twenty, having previously accepted the faith and identified himself with the Christian Church in the little quarry town of Grafton, Ohio. He continued active in the different departments of work in his church all during his school years with the ultimate result of his entering the ministry.

Having no financial means, while in school he made his way by doing odd jobs about town, house painting and decorating, sketching, etc. After two years of school life, while laboring to gain funds in order that he might continue his



schooling, he contracted from overwork and out-door exposure a severe case of pneumonia that left his eyesight badly impaired and his constitution in such condition, that to the present day, he has never fully recovered.

Air castles were tumbled and hopes blasted when his physician advised him that it would be fatal to reenter school for, at least, another year. Whereupon, seeking health and a means of existence, starting from a point on the Mahoning river, he canoed with sketch and note book, but alone, down stream a distance of more than five hundred miles. From this point, by train, he embarked for the Ozark mountains in southwest Missouri. Here, for some months, while gradually regaining his strength, he secured employment at farm work, sketching and painting at intervals.

Once more, he found himself on bed-rock, taking his last cent to pay express charges back to Ohio on some finished pictures, but, this time, fortune smiled promptly with a good check by return mail.

It was while in the Ozarks that Harold Bell Wright preached his first sermon. Being a regular attendant at the services, held in the little mountain log school house, he was asked to talk to the people, one Sunday, when the regular preacher had failed to appear.

From this Sunday morning talk, that could hardly be called a sermon, and others that followed, he came to feel that he could do more good in the ministry than he could in any other field of labor,



and soon thereafter accepted a regular pastorate at Pierce City, Missouri, at a yearly salary of four hundred dollars True to a resolve, that his work should be that through which he could help the most people, he had now chosen the ministry. A further resolve that he would give up this ministry, chosen with such earnest conviction, should another field of labor offer more extensive measures for reaching mankind, took him, in later years, into the field of literature. He left the ministry with many regrets but with the same earnest conviction with which he had earlier chosen it.

Following the publication of "The Shepherd of the Hills" his publishers assured him that he could secure greater results from his pen rather than his pulpit and prevailed upon him to henceforth make literature his life work. This was in every way consistent with his teaching that every man's ministry is that work through which he can accomplish the greatest good.

In the battle of life there is always the higher ground that the many covet but few attain. In reaching this height Mr. Wright has given to a multitude, his time, strength and substance, that they, too, might further advance. He is companionable, loving and loyal to his friends. He hates sham and hypocrisy and any attempt to glorify one's self by means other than the fruits of one's own labor.

This boy, who from the death of his mother, was driven into a hand to hand struggle with life for a bare existence, was necessarily forced into contact with

much that was vicious and corrupt. But he in no way became a part of it. That same inherent love for mental cleanliness and spiritual truths that has so distinguished the works of the man kept the boy unstained in his unfortunate environment.

Mr. Wright resigned his charge at Pierce City for the larger work at Pittsburg, Kansas. In the second year of his pastorate—1899—he married Frances E. Long in Buffalo, New York. This union of love had its beginning back in the school days at Hiram. Unto them have been born three sons, Gilbert Munger, 1901, Paul Williams, 1902, and Norman Hall, 1910.

In Pittsburg, Mr. Wright received enthusiastic support from his church people. Finances were soon in a satisfactory condition, and church attendance reached the capacity of the building, but still the young pastor was not satisfied. Pittsburg was a mining town, a young men's town. A little city with saloons and brothels doing business on every hand. His soul was on fire for his church to do a larger work and, with the hope of arousing his people, he conceived the idea of writing "That Printer of Udell's," planning to read the story, by installments, on special evenings of successive weeks, to his congregation.

Pittsburg was made the principal scene and the church of the story was the kind of church he wanted his Pittsburg charge to be. The teachings set forth, through the preacher of the story, in the latter half of the book, are the identical things

the author was preaching. The first chapters of the story are very largely colored by Mr. Wright's early life, but they are by no means autobiographical.

"That Printer of Udell's" was written without thought or intention of offering it for publication. During the author's ministry he made some of the warmest and most abiding friendships of his life, and it was through certain of these friends that he was persuaded from reading the story, as intended, but to offer it for publication, giving it, thus, a wider usefulness.

Having a leave of absence of several weeks from his church during the winter of 1901-2 he accepted an invitation from the pastor of a Chicago church to hold a special meeting, and it was during this meeting that the author and his publisher met for the first time. Mr. Wright delivered a sermon entitled "Sculptors of Life" that was so impressive that I sought him out with entreaties to repeat his sermon as a lecture to a certain company of young people.

The acquaintance thus begun very quickly became one of friendship, without any knowledge or thought that it would in time lead to a co-operative life work, and when the author later offered his book for publication it was without request or thought of financial remuneration. Mr. Wright, however, was given a contract paying him the highest royalty that was being paid for any author's first book.

"That Printer of Udell's" was written almost entirely in the late hours of the

night and the very early hours of the morning. Great demands were being made on the author's time in the way of requests for officiating and speaking at public and civic functions in addition to the now heavy requirements of his church. His aggressive activities, backed by his splendid spirit, fearlessness and courage in combating the evils of his little city made for him a host of admirers, alike, among his enemies and friends. When he left to accept a pastorate in Kansas City, Missouri, his resignation was not accepted.

After one year in Kansas City he found that he was not physically able to carry out the great city work as he had dreamed it and planned it, on a scale that would satisfy his longings for service, and it made him seriously consider whether there was not some other way that would more equally measure with his strength. He went again to the Ozarks, this time for rest and meditation, and while there began writing "The Shepherd of the Hills." This story has a peculiar significance for the author. He feels toward it as he can not feel for any of his other books. "The Shepherd of the Hills" was written as a test. The strength of the message he was able to put into the story and the response it should find in the hearts of men and women was to decide for him his ministry henceforth, whether he would teach the precepts of the Man of Galilee by voice or pen. It was a testing time that bore fruit not only in this simple, sweet story, that to quote an eminent divine, "is one of



the greatest sermons of our day," but resulted as well in the splendid volumes that have followed.

"The Shepherd of the Hills" was finished during the year of his pastorate at Lebanon, Missouri, and but for the sympathy, encouragement and helpful understanding of his church officers and membership, it is doubtful if the story could ever have been completed. When Mr. Wright delivered the manuscript to his publishers the first of the year, 1907, for publication the next fall, he had accepted the pastorate of the Christian Church in Redlands, California, hoping this land of sunshine would give him a larger measure of health.

Some months later, resigning his Redlands pastorate, he went to the Imperial Valley and there, the following year, wrote "The Calling of Dan Matthews." The church and its problems were weighing on the author and affecting his life no less than when he was in the ministry and it was only natural that he should give to the world "a picture that is true to the four corners of the earth." Every incident in the story has its counterpart in real life and, with but few exceptions, came under the author's personal observation. He did not get the real pleasure out of writing "The Calling of Dan Matthews" that he did the story which preceded it. But he could not, try as he would, escape it.

The publication of "The Calling of Dan Matthews" in the fall of 1909 was just two years after the publication of "The Shepherd of the Hills."

"The Winning of Barbara Worth" required more time and effort in the collecting of material than any book the author had written, but probably gave him, at least, as much pleasure. He is very careful with regard to descriptive detail, and even while writing "The Calling of Dan Matthews" he was making a study of the desert and this great reclamation project. Before sending his manuscript for publication he had it checked over by the best engineers on the Pacific coast for inaccuracies in any of his descriptions that involved engineering or reclamation problems.

"The Winning of Barbara Worth" bears the distinction, without doubt, of being the only book ever published that called its publisher and illustrator from a distance of two and three thousand miles, into the heart of a great desert, for a consultation with its author. This story of the Imperial Valley and its reclamation was written in the same study as was "The Calling of Dan Matthews." A study of rude construction, about eighteen by thirty-five feet, with thatched roof and outside covering of native arrow-weed and built entirely by the author himself.

When Mr. Wright finished "The Winning of Barbara Worth"—so named in honor of Ruth Barbara Reynolds—he was a sick man. He often worked the night through, overtaxing his nerves and strength. For several months he virtually dwelt within the four walls of his study and for a time it was feared he would not live to finish the book. He wrote the last chapters while confined to his bed, after

which he was taken by easy stages, through the kindness of friends, to that part of Northern Arizona that is so delightful to all lovers of the out-of-doors. In this bracing mile-high atmosphere he soon grew well and strong, almost to ruggedness, and on the day his book was published he was riding in a wild-horse chase over a country wild and rough where the writer of this sketch would only care to go, carefully picking his way, on foot. So it was weeks after publication before the author saw the first bound copy of his book. During these summer and fall months, while regaining his strength, he was busy with sketch and note book collecting material, for this part of Arizona is the scene of his novel "When a Man's a Man."

"Their Yesterdays" was written in Tucson, Arizona, and was published in the fall of 1912, just one year after the publication of "The Winning of Barbara Worth." In order to write this story, with the least possible strain on his nerves and vitality, Mr. Wright secluded himself in a little cottage purchased especially for this work. His material was collected from the observations of his thoughtful years and his intimate knowledge of human hearts. This book is, perhaps, more representative of the real Harold Bell Wright than anything he has done. It is the true presentation of his views on life, love and religion. I once asked Mr. Wright, in behalf of the faculty, to deliver an address to a graduating class of some twenty-odd young men of the Morgan Park Academy (Chicago).

He was very busy and I suggested that without special effort he make the commonplace remarks that one so often hears on like occasions. For the first time that I remember he somewhat impatiently resented a suggestion from me, saying, "These young men are on the threshold of life and the very best that is within me is due to them. I can give to them only such a message as I would, were I to stand before judgment on the morrow." It was with just this spirit that the author wrote "Their Yesterdays."

Following "Their Yesterdays" the next book in order of publication was "The Eyes of the World" published in the fall of 1914. It was written in the same arrow-weed study on Tecolote Rancho in the Imperial Valley where he wrote "The Calling of Dan Matthews" and "The Winning of Barbara Worth." Being fully in sympathy with the author's purpose in writing this story, the campaign of advertising was of such educational character and so eventful in many ways, that it will long be remembered by authors, publishers and reading public, and, we trust, make for cleaner books and pictures.

As it was in the writing of "The Calling of Dan Matthews" so it was in the writing of "The Eyes of the World," the sense of duty stood highest. The modern trend in books and music and art and drama had so incensed the author that "The Eyes of the World" was the result of his all impelling desire for cleaner living and thinking. As is true of all writers, there are sometimes those who fail to catch the message in Mr. Wright's



books. He is occasionally misunderstood, and that was especially true with "The Eyes of the World." To the great majority of people, clean living and thinking, the message was not to be misinterpreted and to them the book is blessed. To that small minority it was convicting and, from a few such, it brought forth condemnation which, in a fellow author here and there, was pronounced and emphasized by envy and jealousy. To critics of this class Mr. Wright makes no reply and is not in the least disturbed.

"The Uncrowned King," a small volume—an allegory—published in 1910, to me, is one of the most delightful of Mr. Wright's books. Possibly, it has an added charm because of certain peculiar conditions. It was written in Redlands, California, during the winter of 1909-10, although the notion for the little volume occurred to the author while living in Kansas City. It was one of those times when the longing and will to do a work greater than the physical would permit seemed almost overpowering when, unconsciously coming to his aid, a young woman talking to a company of Christian Endeavorers chanced to remark, "After all, the real kings of earth are seldom crowned." All through the evening service thoughts that this inspired kept running through the author's mind and late that same night he wrote the outline which was only completed some years later and given to his publishers to enrich the world.

His first four novels in order of publication have been dramatized and en-

joyed by thousands from before the foot-lights and it has been a delight to renew acquaintances with old friends in this way. It remained for "The Eyes of the World" to be the first of his books to be presented in a feature production of motion pictures.

The likes and dislikes of Harold Bell Wright are quite pronounced. He is unpretending, cares not for the lime-light and avoids interviews for the public press. Loud, boisterous conversation is but little less offensive to him than vulgarity in speech or action. His friends are strong, clean-minded men who are doing things in the world and are as necessary to his being as the air to his existence, and his generosity to them is no less marked than his caring and providing for his family, which is almost a passion. He is extremely fond of most forms of out-door life. The desert with its vast expanse, fierce solitude and varied colors is no less attractive to him than the peaceful quiet of wooded dells, the beauty of flowering meadows or the rugged mountains with their roaring trout streams that furnish him hours of sport with rod and line. He enjoys hunting, horse-back riding or long tramps afoot. But when there is work to be done it is the one thing that bulks largest and all else must wait.

After finishing "The Eyes of the World" Mr. Wright embarked on the building of a home in the Santa Monica mountains near Hollywood, California. So in the summer of 1915 the little family of five began making their residence in the new

canyon home, one of nature's delightful spots.

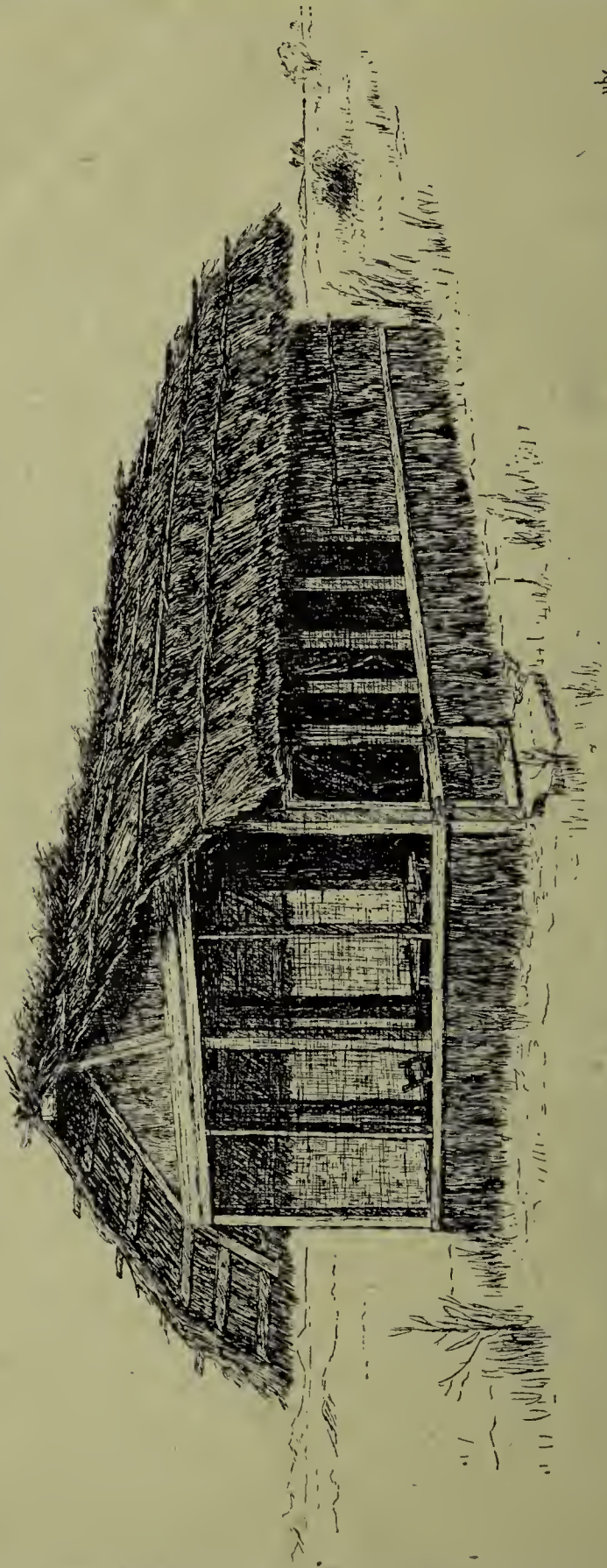
Then again, the author went into camp in the Arizona desert while writing "When a Man's a Man." For he finds it very helpful to live in the atmosphere of his story while doing the actual writing and he also avoids frequent interruption. I think he got more real enjoyment out of this story than any he has previously done. It is a story of the out-of-doors in this great unfenced land where a man must be a man. I suppose, too, he enjoyed writing this work so much, partly, because it comes so easy for him to just tell a story without the intervention of some nerve racking problem. The only book he has heretofore written that is purely a story is "The Shepherd of the Hills," and I sometimes wonder to what proportion of his readers does this Ozark story hold first place. To all such, I am sure, "When a Man's a Man" will find a reception of special heartiness because it is just a fine, big, wholesome novel of simple sweetness and virile strength.

I have written this sketch of Harold Bell Wright that you may know him as intimately, if possible, as if you had met him in person. But should you have the opportunity of making his acquaintance do not deny yourself the pleasure. If you are a lover of his books I am sure you are just the kind of person that the author himself delights to meet.

"Relay Heights,"

February 15, 1916.





Mr. Wright's arrow-weed study at Tecolote Rancho where he wrote "The Calling of Dan Matthews,"  
"The Winning of Barbara Worth" and "The Eyes of the World."